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Playing Cards



As is the case with all very ancient pastimes, the origin of playing-cards is obscure. Many nations having been credited with the invention, but the generally accepted view is that they come from Asia. In a Chinese dictionary it is said that cards were invented in the reign of Seun-ho, 1120 A.D., for the amusement of his concubines.

There is a tradition that cards have existed in India from time immemorial - and that they were invented by the Brahmans.

Their invention has also been assigned to the Egyptians, with whom they were said to have had a religious meaning, and to the Arabs.

The time and manner of the introduction of cards into Europe are matters of dispute. An early mention of a distinct series of playing cards is the entry of the treasurer of the household of Charles VI of France, in his book of accounts for 1392 or 1393.

The safe conclusion with regard to their introduction is that, though they may possibly have been known to a few persons in Europe about the middle of the 14th century, they did not come into general use until about a half-century later. The Crusaders, who were inveterate gamblers, may have been the instruments of their introduction.

Towards the end of the 14th century cards seem to have become common, for in an edict of the provost of Paris in 1397, working-people are forbidden to play at tennis, bowls, dice, cards or nine-pins on working days.

In Italy it is possible that they were generally known at a somewhat earlier date. In the 15th century they were often the object of the attacks of the clergy. In 1423 St Bernardino of Siena preached a celebrated sermon against them at Bologna, in which, like the English Puritans after him, he attributed their invention to the devil.

Cards in Germany are referred to in a manuscript of Nuremberg

about 1384. In form the earliest cards were generally rectangular or square, though sometimes circular.

Early in the 15th century the making of cards had become a regular trade in Germany. Cards were also manufactured in Italy at least as early as 1425.

The early card-makers or card-painters of Ulm, Nuremberg and Augsburg, from about 1418-1450, were also wood-engravers, as the cards of that period were printed from woodblocks. Many of the earliest woodcuts were coloured by means of a stencil, so it would seem that at the time wood-engraving was first introduced, the art of depicting and colouring figures by means of stencil plates was well known.

The marks of the suits on the earliest cards (German) are hearts, bells, leaves and acorns. Next in antiquity to the marks mentioned are swords, batons, cups and money. These are the most common on Italian cards of the late 15th century, and are used both in Italy and in Spain.

French cards of the 16th century bear the marks now generally used in France and England, viz. cœur (hearts), trefle (clubs), pique (spades) and carreau (diamonds).

The court cards of the early packs were king, chevalier and knave. The Italians were probably the first to substitute a queen for the chevalier. The court cards of French packs received fanciful names, which varied from time to time.

I have a facsimile pack of cards, a limited edition of "Schwyzer Spielkartenenris, in der Art von 1515 (Marignano) einköpfig, eckig und hinten schwarz". The Unders are Schwyzer Krieger, the Obers are Schwyzer Söldnerführer, and the Kings are Maximilian I, Roman Emperor, Ferdinand V, King of Spain, Pope Leo X and Franz I, King of France. tb

Nine-pin bowling



Nine-pin bowling is a bowling game played primarily in Europe. European championships are held each year. In Europe overall, there are some 130,000 players.

In Switzerland the nine-pin bowling balls are much bigger and heavier than ten-pin bowling balls. There are two holes, one for the thumb and one for the other fingers.

Pin points are added up for each throw. Professional players get up to 900 points (which means an average of 7.5 points per throw) and more. Usually, the number of points awarded equals the number of pins thrown down.

In intra-club play and leisure play, many different games can be played, such as aiming for a specific sum without overshooting, throwing at specific combinations of less than nine pins, aiming to achieve results from "one" to "nine" in a row with the least number of throws, etc.

Twelve points are awarded if the central pin ("kingpin") remains standing while all others are thrown down; however, this rule is only applied in leisure play and not in competitions.

Many nine-pin bowling teams have both male and female bowlers with ages that span from teenagers up to 80 and 90.

Nine-pin bowling sometimes uses human "pin-setters" who have the responsibility of a) returning the bowling ball, and b) resetting the "Full House" as necessary. While this may be a throwback to a forgotten age, there are many civic leaders whose first job was as a pin-setter.

Many successful ten-pin bowlers struggle with nine-pin bowling. There are many theories as to why this is so - and it can always serve as a good excuse for less than impressive results. So don't be shy and try your club's Kegelbahn - or make the most of it when you visit a club that has a Kegelbahn!

Schwingen

Schwingen, also known as Swiss wrestling, is a style of folk wrestling native to Switzerland, more specifically the pre-alpine parts of German-speaking Switzerland. Wrestlers wear Schwinghosen ("wrestling breeches") with belts that are used for taking holds. Throws and trips are common because the first competitor to pin his opponent's shoulders to the ground wins the bout.

Schwingen is considered a "national sport" of Switzerland, alongside Hornussen and Stein-stossen.

As with other types of folk wrestling, the roots of Schwingen in Switzerland cannot be determined exactly.

Schwingen as a special form of grappling in Alpine culture can be traced to the early 17th century. This form of grappling is preserved during the 17th and 18th century in the Emmental, Haslital and Entlebuch regions specifically. In 18th century travel literature, Schwingen figures as part of the stereotypes of Swiss alpine culture. The Entlebuch pastor Franz Josef Stalder in 1797 records a set of rules in his 'Fragmente über Entlebuch'.

The modern sport was institutionalized in the 19th century out of older, regional traditions.

The modern history of the sport begins during the period of Mediation, with the Unspunnenfest of 1805. In the late 19th century, memorable Schwing festivals and a lively activity of educated gymnastics teachers brought Schwingen to the big cities. Thus the original fight of the herders and farmers became a national sport that reached all social levels. The associations, headed by the Eidgenössischer Schwingerverband, organized the sport by integrating regional peculiarities, improving the abilities of the fighters with teaching books and practices, and creating modern tournament rules.

The match takes place in a ring, a circular area with a diameter of 12 meters that is covered with sawdust. The two opponents wear short pants made of drill over their clothes. The wrestlers hold each other by these pants, at the back where the belt meets, and try to throw the opponent onto his back. There are several main throws, with names like "kurz", "übersprung" and "wyberhaagge", some of them very similar to judo techniques - "hüfter" is almost identical to koshi guruma, "brienzer" is basically uchi mata. These throws are found in many wrestling systems that have even the slightest emphasis on throwing the opponent, and can also be seen in shuaijiao. A match is won when the winner holds the opponent's pants with at least one hand and both the opponent's shoulders touch the ground. By tradition the winner brushes the saw dust off the loser's back after the match.

The match is judged by three referees, one of whom stands in the ring. The referees give points, with a maximum of ten points for a winning throw. If the match ends without a clear win, the more active Schwinger is awarded the higher number of points.

At a Schwing festival, every Schwinger wrestles six opponents, or eight at the Eidgenössische. The two Schwingers with the highest number of points after five (seven at the Eidgenössische) matches get to the Schlussgang (last round). The matching of the Schwingers is done by the fight court according to arcane rules. Often there are suspicions that the matchings have not been fair, and favor one contestant over the others.

There are no weight classes nor any other categories. Usually, though, Schwingers are big men, over 180 cm tall and weighing in excess of 100 kg, and are mostly craftsmen from traditional professions that require some physical force, like carpenters, butchers, lumberjacks or cheesemakers.

Regional and cantonal Schwing festivals are held outdoors, between early summer and autumn.

The most important Schwing festival is the Eidgenössisches Schwing- und Älplerfest, which takes place every three years. The winner of this tournament is proclaimed Schwingerkönig and receives a bull as his prize.

The second most important Schwing festival is held every year in Taranaki at the Taranaki Swiss Club picnic in February – and you are invited to it!

Traditionally, Schwingen is a male sport. Women have only been schwinging for a few years, the Frauenschwingverband, women's Schwing association, having been founded in 1992.

The Sennenschwinger (members of a pure Schwing club) wear dark trousers and a colored shirt, mostly bright blue, while the Turnerschwinger (members of a sports club dedicated to other sports as well) wear white pants and a white t-shirt.

Advertising and sponsoring is shunned at Schwingen. Successful Schwingers do not receive cash prizes but natural prizes, like cow bells, furniture or live stock. These prizes may be sold for money.

The best Schwingers at a festival are given a wreath, the winner of the Eidgenössische is given the title of Schwingerkönig (schwinger king).



Both shoulders in the sawdust yet?

Football

Football (or soccer, as North Americans call it) is by far the most popular sport in Europe, and Switzerland is no exception. European football dominates sport reports on television, radio and in newspapers. There are different football leagues, two on national level and several more on regional level. Rugby plays no role in Switzerland.



European football (soccer) is played everywhere throughout Switzerland, both by large numbers of amateurs and by professional players. As large amounts of money (high wages and huge transfer sums for top scorers) dominate the scene, only the big cities have a real chance to stay in the Super League. Smaller clubs consist of amateur footballers.

There are some women's football clubs in Switzerland with 14,200 active (licensed) players, but they really have a hard time gaining even a fraction of the enormous attention and popularity male footballers are given by the media and the public.

Ice-hockey



The remarkable thing about ice-hockey in Switzerland is that there are five teams from small towns and villages among the top ten despite the fact that ice-hockey is dominated by professional teams. The top teams engage some foreign players (mostly from the USA, Canada or Sweden).

Basketball



15 out of the 20 top basketball teams come from French speaking western Switzerland, four more from Italian speaking southern Switzerland. German speaking teams (one of twenty) seem to be without a chance - this is statistically definitely abnormal with 74% of the population living in German speaking Switzerland.

Gymnastics and Athletics



Track and field athletics and gymnastics should not be underestimated though one will rarely find them on the sports pages of Swiss newspapers. Thousands of athletes meet regularly once a week or even more often for training (and sociability) throughout the country. There are some contests and above all there is the Eidgenössische Turnfest [Swiss Federal Gymnasts Meeting] where they all meet for a few days.

Volleyball



Volleyball is probably the most popular team sport among Swiss women.

Swiss Runners



Jogging, mid- and long-distance running and nordic walking have become very popular among men, women and children in Switzerland over the last decade. More than 800,000 people (11 % of the total population) are active runners, joggers or nordic walkers. Many cities and alpine resorts organize so-called popular races. In addition there are still some of the traditional armed races for men (long distance races in Swiss Army uniforms with an army backpack and a rifle).

Popular Summer Sports



Next to running, activities like biking, mountain biking and skating on roller-blades are very popular in Switzerland. Hiking and climbing used to be on top of the list of summer sports once and are still quite widespread among the more than 30 year old generation. Clubs do exist for all of these sports, but still more people prefer to practise these sports individually.

Swimming (and sunbathing) are extremely popular in summer. Open air public swimming pools and lakeside swimming facilities can be found all over the country, they are usually open from end of May to mid- September. All major towns and even many schools have indoor swimming pools. All children learn to swim in school,

Despite of rather expensive equipment, thousands of people can be seen riding on horseback, golfing, sailing, windsurfing, paragliding and river-rafting on weekends.

Popular Winter Sports



In the 1970s, children in Swiss schools learnt a song with the refrain "Alles fahrt Schii, Schii fahrt di ganzi Nation" [everybody is skiing, all the nation does] - and this was indeed quite true. Downhill skiing is still very popular among the more than 30 year old, while younger people prefer snowboarding to classical downhill skiing.

Cross-country skiing is the domain of the Swiss over 40. More than 12,000 skiers participate each year in the Engadin Skimarathon.

All major towns and most alpine resorts in Switzerland have an ice-field that can be used from December to March.